

## THE BLACK SEA ALLIANCE IS A FAR OUTLOOK

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Nowadays, the Black Sea does not possess the strategic significance it once had in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Europe is no longer the center of foreign policy like it was a century, half-century, or even 25-30 years ago. So if we want to be realistic, it's clear that the Black Sea Fleet will never attain the same power it once had.

**The symbolic presence of Russia in the post-Soviet area is an important and ongoing concern. But if we talk about real geopolitics, addressed to the southern seas, it is clear that the significance of the Black Sea Fleet has significantly weakened over the last 25 years.** Nevertheless, the presence of the Black Sea Fleet in the Crimea is a symbolic sign that Russia is still a leading actor in the post-Soviet territory. Moreover, their presence remains as a stepping stone for forging a new type of rela-

tions, most of all, in economic matters. The main thing that Ukraine and Russia have obtained from this deal is that they have avoided some sharp problems that would inevitably emerge had Russia been forced to withdraw its fleet from the Crimea. Had this happened, all of the radical powers both in Russia and in Ukraine would certainly try to press their influence. This would cause a very serious crisis, bearing in mind Ukraine's significance within the overall system of European security.

Ultimately, it is difficult to put a price on the deal that was reached. The 40 billion or so of money mentioned is all contingent; at the moment, Ukraine doesn't have it anyway. As was the case 1,5 year ago, failure to pay for gas could cause a new international crisis involving European consumers of Russian gas. In such a position, any Ukrainian government – even the most loyal to Moscow – would be forced to engineer some sort of conflict. In effect, **Russia refused payments which she would have never seen anyway.**

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It is hardly worth talking about any Black Sea Alliance based on the model offered by Nicolas Sarkozy for the Mediterranean Sea. After all,

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countries of this region already belong to vastly different alliances, and it is clear that American interests in the region are still strong.

It's another matter, however, how the situation could change in the region with increasing Russian activity and new Turkish approach-

es. At the moment, Turkey is the most powerful state in the region. **Without doubt, Turkey, and not NATO, is the most dominant military force in the Black Sea.** And right now it is actively pursuing a very independent and ambitious policy. In this context, Russia and Turkey's mutual interests have evidently increased – both economically and more generally. This fact will no doubt define future developments of the region over the coming decades. As a country that likes to strengthen its regional influence, Turkey is working hard to improve relations with all its neighboring countries. More opportunities will become available to Turkey the less likely it is for conflict to emerge in neighboring regions. Thus, competition between Russia and Turkey is out of the question – what's needed is constructive communication about mutually beneficial initiatives.

Turkey of course still has strategic control over the straits. **But today, the problem of the straits is of greater importance to the United States than to Russia.** During the war in Iraq, Turkey refused to provide the US with base support. As well, Turkey was very careful about admitting NATO ships into the Black Sea during the war in Georgia. Naturally, Turkey uses this instrument as best it can, and is extremely interested in

maintaining it. As for Russia, control of the straits is of little importance. Judging by the facts, Moscow does not seem to have any ambitions in the region that go beyond the borders of the Black Sea.■

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